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ABSTRACT

The results of the first semester's work of the Withdrawal Office of the University of Maryland, Baltimore County, are presented in four reports. A brief historical overview and introduction by Deborah Hazel Johnson describes the objectives of implementing a withdrawal procedure, the purposes of the Withdrawal Office, and procedures that were used to collect information on withdrawing students. Three study approaches were as follows: completion of questionnaires by withdrawing students; completion of questionnaires by interviewers who counseled withdrawing students; and evaluation of the Withdrawal Office, including analysis of contact reports, time usage, and outcomes for students as revealed by followup studies. In "Characteristics of Withdrawing Students," Samuel A. Gordon and Deborah Hazel Johnson provide data on the types of withdrawing students and their stated reasons for withdrawing. In "Student and Interviewer Perceptions of Withdrawal," Mary Susege and Johnson consider the relationships between these students' self-perceptions and the perceptions of them by the withdrawal interviewers. In the final report, "Evaluation of the Withdrawal Office for Spring 1981," Kim Daubman and Johnson evaluate the Withdrawal Office on several dimensions. Highlights of study findings as well as student and interviewer questionnaires are included. (SW)

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Office of Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs

University of Maryland Baltimore County

Catonsville, Maryland 21228

Report of the Withdrawal Office: The Who, When, Why, and How of Withdrawal at University of Maryland Baltimore County Spring Semester 1981

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Research Report #3
January 1982

The computer time for this project was supported in full through the facilities of the Computer Science Center of the University of Maryland - College Park

HIGHLIGHTS

This report provides information on withdrawing students at UMBC and the Withdrawal Office, for Spring semester 1981. Some particularly noteworthy points are:

- 204 students withdrew from UMBC (179 through the Withdrawal Office) during Spring Semester, 1981 (page 5).
- The percentage of withdrawing minorities was similar to the percentage of minorities in the overall UMBC student population (page 7).
- Students older than traditional college age are withdrawing from UMBC at a disproportionate rate compared to younger students (page 7).
- 42% of the withdrawing students were freshmen (page 7).
- Personal problems were the major reason given for withdrawing, followed by academic difficulties, school/work conflict, and lack of money (page 9).
- While about half the withdrawing students expressed dissatisfaction with UMBC, disliking UMBC was rarely the main reason for leaving (page 27).
- School/work conflict was a more important withdrawal reason for part-time students than it was for full-time students (according to the interviewers) (page 24).
- 44% of the withdrawing students had talked to a UMBC staff person before deciding to withdraw (page 12).
- 58% of the withdrawing students planned to return to UMBC in a semester or two (page 13).

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HISTORICAL OVERVIEW & INTRODUCTION

Deborah Hazel Johnson

In the Spring of 1979, issues of student attrition at UMBC were addressed by an ad hoc task force, hosted within Student Services and chaired by (then) Dean Virginia Redd. A primary purpose of the task force meetings was to coordinate the work of those persons and offices already working on reducing attrition. The culmination of the meetings was a report to Chancellor John Dorsey which, among other things, recommended specific immediate courses of action to reduce attrition. One recommendation was to establish an exit interview procedure for withdrawing students. After Administrative Council approved these recommendations, the Withdrawal Office was opened on a pilot basis in January, 1981; at the end of that Spring Semester the project was to be evaluated and revised according to the findings of the evaluation.

The overarching objective of implementing a withdrawal procedure was to increase student retention at UMBC. As the above-mentioned task force noted, "Our failure to grow in overall enrollment is related not to problems of recruitment of new students but to heavy attrition among continuing students. This heavy attrition is historical with UMBC and, if it is not addressed immediately, it will continue to impact negatively on our enrollment picture". Indeed, as the Report of the Chancellor's Commission on Student Retention and Attrition (1981) noted, UMBC

lost approximately 1115 students to attrition (dismissal, voluntary withdrawal, or non-return) between Fall 1978 and Fall 1979. The Withdrawal Office was established to influence attrition in two ways: 1) to aid individual students considering leaving UMBC, and 2) to collect data on withdrawing students in order to provide a firm empirical base on which attrition-prevention programs can be built.

The current report presents the results of the first semester's work of the Withdrawal Office. Data collection took place in three separate but connected ways. All withdrawing students responded to specially designed questionnaires before beginning the withdrawal process to obtain information on characteristics of withdrawing students. Secondly, after each such student was counseled by a Withdrawal Interviewer, the Interviewer completed a questionnaire so we could compare students' and interviewers' perceptions of the reasons for withdrawal and dissatisfactions with UMBC. Finally, a multi-faceted program evaluation of the Withdrawal Office was done, including evaluations of the ongoing process, through such data as contact reports and time usage, and of the outcomes, through follow-ups of withdrawn students. Each of these types of data collection then became the subject of a report, all three of which are included in this Research Report.

On the basis of preliminary reports of the data contained in these reports, the Withdrawal Office was funded to continue operation through the 1981-82 academic year. Its' previous goals of counseling withdrawing students and doing research on student attrition are being continued, with studies planned to investigate

the non-withdrawing but non-returning students and to compare leaving students with retained students. There will be greatest emphasis on preventing attrition by offering counseling to students even considering withdrawing. In addition, a new Academic Leave policy will be monitored through the Office (now called the Academic Leave and Withdrawal Office (ALWO), allowing students to take a temporary planned interruption in classroom instruction. This policy will make it possible for a student to suspend academic work for up to one year and then make a smooth re-entry back to UMBC. In these ways, our hope is to make UMBC an institution responsive to the needs of current students.

The three following reports are independent but inter-related ways of understanding withdrawal at UMBC. The first report, by Samuel Gordon and D.H. Johnson, gives data on the types of withdrawing students and their reasons for withdrawing, as stated by the students themselves. The subsequent report, by Mary Susege and D.H. Johnson, considers the relationships between these students' self-perceptions and the perceptions of them by the Withdrawal Interviewers. The final report, by Kim Daubman and D.H. Johnson, evaluates the Withdrawal Office on several dimensions.

CHARACTERISTICS OF WITHDRAWING STUDENTS

Samuel A. Gordon and Deborah Hazel Johnson

Student attrition of all types (dismissal and voluntary withdrawal) represents a major concern for almost every college and university in this country (Pantages, 1978) including UMBC (UMBC Institutional Research Report, 1974). The voluntarily withdrawing students are of particular concern, since most have been, at least up until the time of their withdrawal, relatively successful in their educational programs. Therefore, of all the students involved in attrition, the voluntary withdrawees are the students whom the university should want to retain the most. However, it is probable that some of these students have special dissatisfactions and/or problems with their schools which are important enough to cause their withdrawal. In addition, these dissatisfactions and problems may also be shared by other students at the university who have not yet decided to withdraw. But, unless these dissatisfactions and problems are identified, the situations associated with them may never be corrected. And if these dissatisfactions and problems are indeed shared by not-yet withdrawing students, the phenomenon of attrition can only be expected to continue at its present rate, or even worse, grow.

This research study is the first in a series of studies addressing student withdrawal at UMBC. Using questionnaires developed specifically for use at UMBC, this study identifies common problems, complaints, and dissatisfactions of withdrawing students. In addition, we attempt to compose profiles of the

different types of withdrawing students. Both of these objectives are aimed at providing the UMBC administration with a guide for instituting changes within the university structure that would benefit current and future students.

METHOD

Subjects. 204 undergraduate students formally withdrew from UMBC during Spring semester 1981. Of these, 179 completed the Withdrawal Questionnaire and thus are included in this report. Most of the other 25 students either withdrew by mail (due to being in the discontinued program for prisoners in the Maryland Correctional Institutions or to having an illness) or had their parents complete the withdrawal process for them; three or four students refused to complete the questionnaire.

Procedure. Before beginning the actual withdrawal process, the student was given one of four versions[1] of a basic withdrawal questionnaire developed specifically for use at UMBC (Appendix I). The questionnaires were distributed in envelopes by a staff person of the "Withdrawal Office," and the students were allowed to respond to the questionnaire in private. Both the envelope containers and the privacy while responding were instituted to help ensure the confidentiality of the questionnaire. Students could choose either to complete the questionnaire anonymously or to have their names known for possible follow-up purposes.

Withdrawal Questionnaire. The questionnaires for this study (see Appendix) were developed with the aim of identifying the following: a) demographic information about the students; b) the

students' reasons for attending UMBC: c) the students' personal interactions while at UMBC: d) the students' reasons for withdrawing from UMBC; e) the students' educational and vocational plans after leaving UMBC. All of the questionnaires contained the same basic questions, the majority of which were of multiple-choice type. In addition, each questionnaire assured the respondent at the beginning that the questionnaire would be kept confidential.

RESULTS

We will first report the basic statistical results of the questionnaire. In the subsequent section, we will discuss the meaning and implications of these results.

Demographic Description of Withdrawing Students

What are the characteristics of students withdrawing from UMBC? Are these students any different from the overall UMBC student population?

Of the 179 students responding to the questionnaires, 84 (47%) were male and 95 (53%) were female. The sex distribution of withdrawing students is very similar to that of the overall UMBC student body (45% male and 55% female), so we are not differentially losing men or women through withdrawal.

The average age of the withdrawing students was about 21.5, with men averaging slightly older than women. 54% of the withdrawing students were over age 21, while the overall UMBC undergraduate student body has only 44% of its students in this age bracket. Thus, for whatever reason, students older than the traditional-aged college student are withdrawing from UMBC at a

greater rate than would be indicated by their representation in the student body.[2]

The races of withdrawing student are, in contrast to age, proportionate to those of the general student population. 73% of the withdrawing students were white, compared to 75% whites overall; 17% of withdrawees were black, compared to 15% blacks overall. 10% of the withdrawees were Asians, 1% were Hispanics, and 4% classified themselves in the "Other" category (5% of the UMBC undergraduates are classified as of races other than white or black or are of unspecified race).

Of the 174 withdrawing students providing class status information, 42% were freshmen, 24% sophomores, 16% juniors, and 18% seniors. Freshmen withdrew in significantly[2] higher percentages than they represent in the overall student population, with only about 25% of the student body being freshmen.

Most of the withdrawing students (=173) lived off campus (84%), as do most undergraduates (80%). 50% of the withdrawing commuters lived with their parents and 50% lived independently, quite different percentages than those found in a previous survey of UMBC undergraduates (Johnson & Troy, 1981). In that survey, of the students living off-campus, 80% lived with their parents and 20% lived independently. It appears that there is a disproportionate number of independent commuters who withdrew from UMBC.

The typical withdrawing student was single, without children (78%). Comparison statistics for the overall UMBC population are not available.

Only 21% of the withdrawing students were unemployed (overall n=175), while 41% worked part-time and 38% worked full-time. It is difficult to norm these percentages, since the only available comparison statistics used a different type of question (Johnson & Troy, 1981). From that survey, we learned that about 28% of the undergraduates are employed on campus, with about 45% working off campus, but some of the respondents might have been included in both categories. With 79% of the withdrawees holding jobs, we see that withdrawees more frequently are employed than is true in the general UMBC student population.

Somewhat more than half (63%) the withdrawing students had decided upon a major which was available at UMBC, 22% had decided upon a major unavailable at UMBC, and 15% were still undecided. It is impossible to directly compare these statistics with those for UMBC students in general, since the withdrawing students had not necessarily declared majors they had decided on. Overall, 66% of UMBC students have formally declared majors.

To investigate whether the type of student withdrawing varies over the course of the semester, we divided the semester into three five-week periods. The period in which the greatest percentage of withdrawals took place (49%) was the final five weeks of school. The previous two five-week periods (February 2-March 6 and March 9-April 10) consisted of 27% and 24% of the total number of withdrawing students, respectively. In later analyses, we looked further at these three periods to determine the typical student withdrawing in each period.

Withdrawing Students Reasons for Leaving UMBC

We next examined the reasons these students were withdrawing from UMBC. Because many students withdraw for more than one reason, we listed ten possible reasons and asked the students to mark each as "very important", "somewhat important", or "not important" to them in deciding to withdraw. The overall results are presented at the bottom of Table 1, with breakdowns of the withdrawal reasons by students' demographic characteristics. In discussing the results, we shall note differences between student subgroups only when these differences achieved statistical significance (less than 5 out of 100 chances of happening by chance alone).

It can be seen that the most important reason cited was "personal problems" (78% said this was an important contributing reason in their decision to withdraw). Of particular note in this regard is that 92% of the minorities cited this reason, while only 72% of the whites reported it as an important reason. In addition, while this reason was cited by more than 80% of the students withdrawing during the final 10 weeks of the semester, only 54% of those withdrawing during the first 5 weeks indicated that "personal problems" was an important reason for their withdrawal.

Academic difficulties were cited as an important reason for withdrawal by 51% of the students. 61% of the females, as opposed to only 39% of the males, cited academic difficulties as an important reason. Only 23% of the seniors indicated that they were having academic difficulties, while greater than 50% of the other class statuses made this indication. Students who lived

TABLE 1

NUMBER/PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS CITING A REASON AS IMPORTANT FOR THEIR WITHDRAWAL BY DEMOGRAPHICS

DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLE	PERSONAL PROBLEMS	ACADEMIC DIFFICULTIES	LACK OF MONEY	DON'T LIKE UMBC	SCHOOL/WORK CONFLICT	DON'T LIKE COLLEGE	UMBC DOESN'T OFFER MY MAJOR	UNSURE OF WHY I'M IN COLLEGE	SCHOOL/SOCIAL LIFE CONFLICT	WANT A BREAK FROM SCHOOL
Younger (21 & Under)	63 78.7%	43 53.1%	34 42.5%	20 25%	31 38.7%*	21 26.6%*	14 17.5%	27 34.2%	17 21.5%	31 41.9%*
Older (Over 21)	68 76.4%	43 48.3%	43 47.8%	19 21.6%	50 54.9%	11 12.5%	16 17.8%	20 23%	22 25%	23 25.8%
Minorities	43 91.5%*	29 61.7%	21 44.7%	9 19.1%	18 38.3%	3 6.4%*	7 14.6%	9 19.6%	11 24.4%	14 30.4%
Whites	87 71.9%	57 46.7%	55 45.1%	29 24.2%	62 50.4%	29 24.4%	23 19%	38 31.9%	27 22.3%	39 33.6%
Males	60 75.9%	31 38.7%**	36 45%	10 12.7%**	43 52.4%	13 16.7%	13 16.0%	19 24.1%	14 17.7%	22 28.2%
Females	71 78.9%	55 61.1%	41 45.6%	29 32.6%	38 42.7%	19 21.3%	17 19.1%	28 32.2%	25 28.4%	32 37.6%
Freshmans	56 80%	43 61.4%	32 45.7%	21 30.4%	29 42.6%	15 21.7%	15 21.7%	27 16.6%	19 28.4%	22 33.3%
Sophomores	29 70.7%	20 50.0%**	20 50%	8 20.5%	16 39%	6 15.4%	4 10%	7 4.3%*	10 25%	15 38.5%
Juniors	22 84.6%	16 61.5%	12 46.2%	8 29.6%	15 55.6%	7 26.9%	7 25.9%	8 4.9%	7 26.9%	10 40%
Seniors	21 72.4%	7 22.6%	12 38.7%	2 6.7%	18 58.1%	3 10%	4 12.9%	4 12.9%	2 6.5%	6 19.4%
Reside In Dorms	10 71.4%	7 50%*	8 57.1%	2 14.3%	4 28.6%	4 30.8%	0 0%	4 28.6%**	3 21.4%	8 57.1%*
Reside With Parents	56 78.9%	43 62.3%	27 38.6%	19 27.1%	29 41.4%	18 25.7%	15 21.4%	29 42%	17 25%	25 38.5%
Reside Independently	50 76.9%	27 39.7%	35 52.2%	14 21.5%	36 52.9%	9 13.8%	13 19.4%	11 16.9%	16 24.2%	14 21.2%

*Chi-Square $p < .05$.
**Chi-Square $p < .01$.

TABLE 1 Continued-2

NUMBER/PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS CITING A REASON AS IMPORTANT FOR THEIR WITHDRAWAL BY DEMOGRAPHICS

DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLE	PERSONAL PROBLEMS	ACADEMIC DIFFICULTIES	LACK OF MONEY	DON'T LIKE UMBC	SCHOOL/WORK CONFLICT	DON'T LIKE COLLEGE	UMBC DOESN'T OFFER MY MAJOR	UNSURE OF WHY I'M IN COLLEGE	SCHOOL/SOCIAL LIFE CONFLICT	WANT A BREAK FROM SCHOOL
Declared UMBC Major	83 79%	50 39.7%	49 46.7%	22 21.4%	52 49.1%	16 15.5%	7 6.7%**	21 20.6%**	21 20.4%	33 32.4%
Major Unavailable at UMBC	26 74.3%	17 50%	18 51.4%	8 22.9%	16 45.7%	7 20%	18 51.4%	13 37.1%	8 22.9%	10 29.4%
Undecided About Major	19 76%	18 69.2%	9 34.6%	9 34.6%	11 42.3%	9 36%	5 19.2%	13 52%	10 40%	11 45.8%
Employed Full-Time	46 78%	23 38.3%*	22 36.7%	13 21.7%	43 68.3%**	9 15.3%	13 21.3%	10 16.9%*	11 18.3%	15 25.9%
Employed Part-Time	54 76.1%	44 61.1%	34 47.9%	15 21.4%	30 42.3%	19 27.1%	10 14.1%	24 34.3%	21 30%	29 42.6%
Unemployed	27 77.1%	18 52.9%	20 51.1%	11 32.4%	6 18.2%	14 11.8%	7 20.6%	13 38.2%	6 18.2%	10 29.4%
Single	108 64.7%	73 53.3%	66 48.2%	30 22.1%	62 45.6%	28 20.9%	22 16.2%	45 33.6%*	34 25.4%	50 38.2%*
Married	21 72.4%	12 38.7%	11 35.5%	9 30%	18 54.5%	4 12.9%	8 25%	2 6.7%	5 16.1%	4 12.9%
Non-Parents	111 77.1%	75 51.7%	71 49%	35 24%	68 46.6%	31 21.7%	27 18.5%	46 32.2%*	35 24.5%	51 36.4%
Parents	18 78.3%	10 43.5%	6 26.1%	4 20%	12 52.2%	1 4.5%	3 13.6%	1 4.8%	4 18.2%	3 13.6%
1st 5 Weeks	25 54.3%**	19 41.3%	22 47.8%	17 37.8%*	17 37%	11 24.4%	10 21.7%	16 34.8%	7 15.9%	16 34.8%
2nd 5 Weeks	34 81%	22 53.7%	17 41.5%	9 22.5%	19 45.2%	7 17.5%	3 7.5%	9 23.7%	9 22%	10 25.6%
3rd 5 Weeks	72 88.9%	45 54.2%	38 45.8%	13 33.3%	45 54.2%	14 17.1%	17 20.2%	22 26.8%	23 28%	28 35.9%
Totals	131 77.5%	86 50.6%	77 45.3%	39 23.2%	81 47.4%	32 19.2%	30 17.6%	47 28.3%	39 23.4%	54 33.1%

*Chi-Square p < .05.
**Chi-Square p < .01.

independently and students who worked full-time, surprisingly, cited "academic difficulties" in relatively low percentages (40% and 38%, respectively) as compared to non-independent and non-full-time employed students (56% and 57%, respectively).

Other reasons which were cited in relatively high percentages were "school/work conflict" (47% (and lack of money (45%). In regards to "school/work conflict", as might be expected, higher percentages of older than younger students and full-time-employed than non-full-time-employed students cited this as an important contributor to their withdrawal decision. Lastly, note should be taken that withdrawing freshmen and seniors indicated that an important reason for withdrawing was their uncertainty in contrast to lower percentages of withdrawing sophomores and juniors citing this as a reason.

Withdrawing Students' Evaluation of Student Services

We wonder whether withdrawing students might feel that they had not been adequately served by the University, so we asked them their evaluations of various student services and aspects of UMBC.

Before detailing how withdrawing students felt about various student services, it should be noted that a substantial percentage of the students responding to the "reactions" question (question X on the questionnaire in Appendix I) indicated that they had never used one or more of the listed student services. On the eleven items which allowed for a student to indicate that he/she had never used a particular student service, an average of 50% of the younger students and 58% of the older ones made this

Table 2

Mean Evaluations and Number of Students Responding to "Reaction" to UMBC Student Services

Student Service	Mean	# Of Students	Student Service	Mean	# Of Students
Counseling Center	3.7	83	Transportation to Campus	3.2	82
Cooperative Education	3.4	60	Residence Life	3.3	58
Learning Resource Center	3.8	81	Social Activities	3.5	90
Financial Aid Office	3.3	96	Quality of Courses	3.7	144*
Faculty Advisement	3.3	116	Range of Courses/Majors	3.6	149*
On-Campus Housing	3.3	57	Student/Faculty Relations	3.5	149
Allied Health Advisor	3.7	58	Physical Planning	3.6	145
Career Development & Placement	3.4	56	Other UMBC Aspect	2.7	25

indication on one or more of the items.

For all of the listed student services, the evaluations given by the students ran the entire range from 1 (very dissatisfied) to 5 (very satisfied). The mean (average) evaluation given a particular service by the students and the number of students who indicated that they had used the service is presented in Table 2. It can be seen that all of the listed services received an average evaluation above 3.0, which would have indicated a neutral evaluation. In addition, all of the UMBC aspects except "quality of courses" and range of courses/majors" received a 3.0 (neutral) rating more often than any other rating. For "quality of courses" and "range of courses/majors", UMBC received a 5.0 (very satisfied) rating more often than any other rating. Thus, withdrawing students seem particularly satisfied with the academic scope and quality at UMBC.

Students' Discussion of Withdrawal Decision

To determine whether students talked with anyone before making their decision to withdrawal and, if so, with whom, a simple frequency count was performed of the persons who indicated that they talked to the various persons listed in the "decision talk" question (question VII on the questionnaire in Appendix I). The results of this frequency count are presented in Table 3A. It can be seen that persons most often cited by the withdrawing students were family; other persons with whom they discussed their decision were friends who did not attend UMBC, other UMBC students, and nobody at all, in that order. The staff persons

Table 3A

Number of Students Discussing Withdrawal Decision With Various Persons

Dept. or Persons(s)	No. of Students	Dept. or Persons(s)	No. of Students
Instructor	19 (10.6%)	Residential Life Staff	4 (2.2%)
Faculty Advisor	18 (10.1%)	Financial Aid Staff	5 (2.8%)
Allied Health Advisor	10 (5.6%)	Family	96 (53.6%)
Learning Resource Center Staff	4 (2.2%)	Other UMBC Students	46 (25.7%)
Counseling Center Staff	19 (10.6%)	Non-UMBC Friends	65 (36.3%)
Career Development & Placement Staff	5 (2.8%)	Other Person(s)	14 (7.8%)
Cooperative Education Staff	4 (2.2%)	Nobody	42 (23.5%)

Table 3B

Number and Percentages of Youth vs Adults Discussing Withdrawal Decision With Various Persons*

Age	Staff Persons	Other UMBC Students	Non-UMBC Friends	Nobody
Youth (21 & under)	27 (33%)	34 (41.5%)	41 (50 %)	11 (13.4%)
Adult (over 21)	17 (17%)	12 (12.4%)	24 (24.7%)	31 (32.3%)

* Presented only for categories with Chi-square significance, $p < .05$.

who were most often cited were the instructors, Counseling Center staff, and faculty advisors. In addition, when staff persons were all grouped together, only 44% of the 179 withdrawing students indicated that they had spoken to a staff person before deciding to withdraw. (It should be noted that some of these students may have talked to more than one staff person).

Lastly, it was found that withdrawing students 21 years-of-age and under differ significantly from the withdrawing students over 21 in regards to four of the persons with whom they might have spoken. The younger withdrawing students spoke to other UMBC students, non-UMBC friends, and staff persons in higher percentages than did the older students. On the other hand, a higher percentage of older students indicated they spoke to no one at all than of younger students. The actual percentages for these four categories are presented in Table 3B. While both younger and older students cited "family" as the most popular people with whom to discuss the withdrawal decision, other categories of persons were used differentially by younger and older students. Older students frequently cited talking to "nobody," while younger students more often talked to non-UMBC friends.

Future Plans of Withdrawing Students

When a student withdraws from UMBC, what does he or she do? Does she/he plan to return to UMBC later, or is withdrawal a more final procedure?

We did a frequency count of the various future plans of withdrawing students (question XI on the questionnaire in Appendix I),

Table 4

Number of Students Indicating a Particular "Future Plan"

Future Plans	No. of Students	Future Plans	No. of Students
Employment (Full or Part-time)	83 (46.4%)	Re-Enter UMBC	103 (57.5%)
Enter Another College	33 (18.4%)	Undecided about future	10 (5.6%)
Enter a Trade or Technical School	10 (5.6%)	Other Future Plans	30 (16.8%)

the results of which are presented in Table 4.

It can be seen that 58% of the withdrawing students had plans for returning to UMBC in a semester or two, while a combined percentage of 24% had plans for entering either another college or a trade or technical school. (It should be noted that student may have indicated more than one future plan in response to this question.)

Depending on the period in the semester, a withdrawing student might have rather different thoughts on whether they planned to return to UMBC. The percentages of students indicating that they planned to return to UMBC progressively increased from those withdrawing during the first 5 week period to those in the third 5 week period. That is, 38% of the students withdrawing during the first 5 week period indicated that they planned to return; and 71% of those withdrawing students during the third and final period indicated they planned to return.

One final note regarding withdrawing students' future plans: Of the 10 persons who indicated that they planned to enter a trade or technical school after leaving UMBC, 8 withdrew during the first 5-weeks of the semester. This number compares to none during the second 5-weeks of the semester and 2 during the final 5-weeks.

DISCUSSION

Who, then, are the students withdrawing from UMBC? We now have enough initial information to sketch some of the ways in

which they are different from the typical UMBC undergraduate and also some of the ways in which they are similar.

Neither sex nor race distinguishes the withdrawee from other students. We found that the number of males and females and of the various races withdrawing is proportionate to the numbers in the overall UMBC student population. We can conclude, then, that UMBC is not differentially treating the sexes or the races in a way that causes them to withdraw in mid-semester. Nor is there something inherent in being of a particular sex or race that causes a student to be more likely to withdraw from our school.

Withdrawing students do, however, differ from the norm in age and in class status. We see a disproportionate number of older students and of freshmen withdrawing. Why is this the case?

Some of our other data gives us some clues. First considering the older students (over age 21), we find their reasons for withdrawing more often being school/work conflict and less often being a dislike of college or a desire for a break from school, compared to younger students. These older students also were less likely to discuss their decision to withdraw with anyone before actually withdrawing. We thus see some indications that these older students may have other concerns in addition to school, and that school may take second priority in a school/work conflict. Perhaps partly due to the importance they place on work, these older students make their decisions to withdraw more autonomously, using fewer of the on-campus services to aid them. While some such attrition seems inevitable, the fact that these students are

withdrawing in mid-semester leads us to speculate that UMBC may be able to take further action to assist the older student in completing the semester.

What about the high withdrawal rate of freshmen? We know that these new students withdraw more frequently due to academic difficulties and/or being unsure of why they are in college. Both problems are not surprising in a new university student, but one of the difficulties of being in a new environment is not knowing what assistance is available for existing problems. Freshmen may wait too long to get help, or may see their only option as withdrawing from school. We would speculate that a more pro-active program to keep freshmen in touch with campus services could serve an important preventative function. For example, orientation that continues throughout the freshman year, rather than being held only prior to beginning classes, could help freshmen have a better sense of belonging and of the services available.

Besides highlighting the need to focus retention programs on the older student and on the freshman, this study also contributes several other points worthy of discussion.

The most interesting finding concerning the persons with whom withdrawing students discussed their decision is that UMBC staff persons were consulted by only 44 of the 179 withdrawing students responding to our questionnaire. While it is understandable that students would discuss such a critical decision with their family and friends, it is regrettable that the people (i.e., instructors, advisors, etc.) who could probably best advise the students regarding the various functionings of the institution

were contacted the least regarding this decision. Since students apparently do not seek out these people, the Withdrawal Office serves the function of requiring students to talk over their decision with a UMBC staff person before withdrawing. As will be seen in the subsequent report by Daubman and Johnson, some students are already using the Withdrawal Office one step before withdrawing, to talk over their problems that could lead to withdrawal. The Withdrawal Office should further publicize and extend this preventative function.

Over half the withdrawing students planned to return to UMBC in the future, suggesting that withdrawal is not usually a function of disliking UMBC. With so many students planning to return, the importance of using the Withdrawal Office to encourage such return becomes clear. Withdrawal needs to be viewed as a temporary education decision, rather than a permanent loss of a student or a "dropping-out".

Implications and Suggestion

The results of this study indicate that withdrawing students hold UMBC in high regard as an institution for higher learning. However, such opinions by no means indicate that UMBC is a perfect school. Indeed, some areas in need of change have been revealed by our study, and in some cases these areas may have already begun undergoing positive changes. One area in which this is the case is the Withdrawal Office. The change in the name of the Withdrawal Office to one which conveys a less negative and less terminal image (Academic Leave and Withdrawal Office) demonstrates a willingness on the part of the university to allow a student to leave and return to UMBC without any far reaching

negative consequences. Such a change in name and the policy that goes with it (e.g., the institution of an abbreviated re-admission form and of a policy of planned academic leave), speak directly to the finding of this study that a majority of withdrawing students plan to return to UMBC in a semester or two.

An additional suggestion for change results from the finding that over half of the withdrawing students never used one or more of the UMBC student services (e.g., the Counseling Center, Cooperative Education). This finding implies a need for greater promotion of these student services as a valuable resource for UMBC students. The fact that only 44 of the withdrawing students indicated that they had discussed their decision with a staff person underscores this need for greater promotion of student services, including the Withdrawal Office. In many cases one or more of these student services may have been able to offer the withdrawing student an alternative to withdrawal, or at least facilitate an early return to continuing their education after withdrawal. Some examples where this may have been the case include a) Cooperative Education for students experiencing a school/work conflict, b) Career Development and Placement and/or Financial Aid for persons in need of economic assistance, and c) Learning Resource Center for students experiencing academic difficulties.

Returning to the subject of the Withdrawal Office, the use of this office as a referral agency for the other UMBC student services should not be taken casually (see, for example, the statistics on referral in the subsequent Daubman and Johnson

study). However, by the time a student reaches the Withdrawal Office he/she has already, in most cases, made a definite decision to withdraw. Therefore, in many cases the referral to other UMBC student services may not be acted upon until future semesters. One possible way to mediate this situation would be to highlight and promote the advisement focus of the Withdrawal Office, particularly for those students who are simply considering withdrawal. In any event, the Withdrawal Office staff should be fairly knowledgeable about the "where's" and "how's" of getting student services at UMBC.

Lastly, the data and information collection function in the Withdrawal Office could be amended but not curtailed. Instead of administering a long and detailed questionnaire to every student before the withdrawal interview, a very short questionnaire might be instituted (possibly contained within the withdrawal application). This questionnaire should be administered after the withdrawal interview, and might possibly be made optional. A detailed questionnaire could possibly be instituted approximately every four years to re-evaluate the institutional conditions leading to student attrition. However, due to the findings of the senior author's thesis (Gordon, 1981) such a questionnaire need not attempt to be structurally attractive, especially if that attempt results in higher financial costs (i.e., due to additional paper costs, etc.).

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Footnotes

1. Four versions of the questionnaire were produced in order to test the hypothesis that different questionnaire formats would affect the manner in which withdrawing students responded to the questionnaire. This hypothesis was central to the main author's Master of Arts thesis at UMBC. The hypothesis was not confirmed and recommendations for the development of future withdrawal questionnaires are made in the discussion section of the current study.

2. For both the age categories and the class status categories, chi-squares were performed with resulting levels of significance $p < .05$ and .001, respectively.

Student and Interviewer Perceptions of Withdrawal

Mary Susege and Deborah Hazel Johnson

Before designing the procedures to be used U.M.B.C.'s Withdrawal Office, the staff examined procedures used at about 20 other schools of comparable size. Of those gathering data on Withdrawing student characteristics, some obtained this information directly from the student, via student questionnaires, and others used information gathered by the interviewer during the counseling session. There were useful rationales for each type of data gathering, and it was difficult to determine whether one type seemed to reap more helpful data than the other. Accordingly, as part of the pilot semester of the Withdrawal Office, we decided to gather data from both the student and the interviewer, to give us a wider range of information and to allow us to compare data gathered from the two sources.

This report, then describes interviewers' perceptions of the withdrawing students and compares these perceptions to information provided by the students themselves. A number of secondary questions were also asked, as are described below.

A factor of major interest was the students' reasons for leaving U.M.B.C. Since we suspected that students might respond one way on a questionnaire but discuss reasons in a rather different way in the interview, we were interested in comparing these two sources of infomation. Furthermore, we delved more deeply into reasons for withdrawal, wondering about the interrelationships among the various

reasons. For example, does a student with a lack of money also tend to have school/work conflict? While a student may have numerous reasons for withdrawing, we hypothesized that there may be certain clusters of such reasons; such clusters could help us better understand the different types of withdrawing students.

Similarly, we believed that different types of students may withdraw at different times in the semester. For example, probably academic difficulties become more relevant later in the semester, while personal problems could occur at any time. If we had a better understanding of the critical times in the semester for various types of students, we might be more able to offer services to prevent withdrawal at these times.

We also questioned whether a student's status (full-time or part-time) affected his or her reasons for withdrawing. Could part-time students be more involved in family or work situations outside school and thus more subject to fluctuations in these areas? Might not a full-time student find specific dissatisfactions with U.M.B.C. more disconcerting than would a part-time student?

All of the above questions explored factors impinging on a student's reasons for withdrawing. We also used the interviewers' data for two other purposes: (a) to examine withdrawing students' major sources of dissatisfaction with U.M.B.C., and (b) to determine whether giving a student a questionnaire before or after the interview affected the types of disclosures made during the interview. While the dissatisfactions question was directed at helping us understand attrition at U.M.B.C., the question regarding the timing of the questionnaire was a more technical one. Does handing the student a questionnaire immediately make him or her feel that the process is

impersonal, or does filling out a questionnaire first stimulate further discussion in the subsequent interview?

The study reported here was designed to address these questions.

METHOD

Subjects. Of the 204 undergraduates withdrawing from U.M.B.C. during Spring semester 1981, both student and interviewer questionnaires were completed for 165 students. These 165 students were the subjects of this study.

Measures. A five question, Withdrawal Interviewer's Questionnaire (Appendix II) was devised for the interviewer based on the information obtained from the interview. The questionnaire covered reasons for leaving U.M.B.C., future plans, probability of returning to U.M.B.C., dissatisfactions with U.M.B.C. and suggestions for its improvement. The measure consisted of one Likert scale, two open-ended questions and two multiple choice questions.

Subjects were presented with an eighteen question Withdrawal Questionnaire (Appendix I; also described in the preceding study) which surveyed students' decisions to come to U.M.B.C., utilization of campus resources, reasons for withdrawal, future plans and demographic information. The scale consisted of multiple choice items, Likert scales and fill-in-the blank items.

Procedure. Students expressing a desire to withdraw from the University completed the Student's Withdrawal Questionnaire, either before or after the interview, depending on the phase in the study. The Withdrawal interviewers independently completed the interviewer's Questionnaire after talking with the student, but without looking

at the Student's Questionnaire. Upon completion of both instruments, the interviewers fastened both together for data collation purposes.

RESULTS

For the sake of clarity, results are reported by content area, without detailed statistics. Wherever differences between groups (full-time vs. part-time) or times (beginning, middle, and end of semester) are noted, analyses done via *t*-tests or analyses of variance found that the differences were larger than those expected by chance ($p < .05$). When relationships between the interviewers' and students' questionnaires are reported, Pearson correlations were done and also found to be larger than what would be expected by chance ($p < .05$). When no differences are mentioned, the statistical tests showed no significant differences between variables.

Reasons for Withdrawing

Interviewers were asked to indicate the extent to which they saw each of several factors as very important in determining the student's decision to withdraw. The most frequent responses were personal problems (37% saw this as very important), academic difficulties (35%), and conflict with work and school (33%).

Part-time vs. full-time students. Partly consistent with our hypothesis, we found part-time students somewhat different from full-timers in their reasons for withdrawing. The one reason eliciting different responses was school/work conflict: this conflict was more important to part-time students than it was to full-time students. Interviewers perceived 55% of the part-time students as withdrawing due to employment conflicts, but only 23% of the full-time students were perceived as having this problem.

Time in semester. Did reasons for withdrawing differ according to time period in the semester? Looking across the different weeks in the semester, we found the thirteenth week to be distinctive in terms of reasons for withdrawal, probably because this time period occurs shortly after the deadline for dropping classes. More than in the other weeks, students withdrawing during the thirteenth week expressed "academic difficulties," "lack of money," "U.M.B.C. doesn't offer desired major," and "dislike of U.M.B.C."

Relationship between questionnaires. Turning to an investigation of how the students' and interviewers' perceptions of withdrawal reasons were related, we found significant correlations for all but one of the reasons. For all reasons except school/social life conflict, students and their interviewers responded with great similarity in terms of the degree to which each reason was important. It is interesting to note, however, that students were more emphatic about the importance of the reasons and/or that interviewers were more conservative in marking the importance. For example, while both students and interviewers saw personal reasons as most important in the students' withdrawal decision, 78% of the students but only 37% of the interviewers marked this reason as "very important." While in either case the conclusion is the same, the intensity is quite different. The one exception was in the area of school and social life conflicts, where there was no relationship between students' responses and their interviewers' perceptions. Students tended to see school and social life conflict as less important to

their withdrawal decision than did the interviewers.

Relationship among reasons. Finally, we investigated the interrelationships among the various withdrawal reasons, as perceived by interviewers. The reason "doesn't like college" was significantly correlated with each of three other reasons: "unsure of major," "school and social life conflict" and "wants a break from school." These items seem to form a cluster describing a student who withdraws due to not having adjusted well to college life.

Probability of Returning to U.M.B.C.

Interviewers rated the students as to their probability of returning to U.M.B.C., using a 5-point scale going from "very improbable" to "very probable." The interviewers thought it very or fairly probable that 61% of the students would return, whereas they saw 25% of the students as unlikely to return. For 15% of the students, it was unclear to the interviewers whether or not they would return.

Time in semester. We found variation in the probability of students returning, depending on the point at which they withdraw. The later in the semester a student withdrew, the more probable he or she would return to U.M.B.C., according to the interviewers. During the first period in the semester, before the refund period ended, only 15% of the 47 students withdrawing were seen as highly probable returners, while 52% were seen as very improbable to return. The probabilities evened out more in the second period (before the end of Add-Drop), with 26% of the 44 withdrawing students seen as very probable to return and 24% as very improbable to return. It is also noteworthy that in this middle period inter-

viewers seemed more unsure about whether students would return, compared to either the first or the last time period. During the final period, signaled by the end of the semester, the probabilities were reversed from those of the first period. Of the 79 students withdrawing at this point, 59% would very probably return, with only 25% very probably not returning.

Relationship between questionnaires. It was not possible to directly compare the results of probability of returning as indicated by interviewers to that indicated by the students, since the questions were asked in quite different formats. However, the overall statistics appear comparable. On the students' questionnaires we found 58% of the withdrawing students planning to return to U.M.B.C., as compared with the interviewers' perceptions that 61% of the students would probably return. While we do not know whether these percentages are referring to the same students, the overall estimates of students and interviewers seem quite similar.

Dissatisfaction with U.M.B.C.

About half of the withdrawing students expressed dissatisfactions with U.M.B.C. to their interviewers, with expressed dissatisfactions most prevalent during the 13th week of the semester (just after deadline for dropping individual classes). Over the whole semester, the greatest source of dissatisfaction involved interaction with faculty and administrators. Of the 74 students who noted dissatisfactions, 23% revealed conflict with faculty and academic departments, 16% experienced registration problems, 14% had a conflict with administration, and 12% felt U.M.B.C. was impersonal and offered no sense

of community. 11% were dissatisfied that U.M.B.C. didn't offer their intended major, 10% felt they were inadequately advised, 8% were dissatisfied with financial policies and procedures, and 6% expressed miscellaneous dissatisfactions.

Timing of the Questionnaire and Interview

To compare the effect of giving a student the questionnaire before the interview to that of giving the questionnaire after the interview, 22 students underwent the procedure in the first way and another 22 in the second, and we then compared the results on the interviewer's questionnaire items. The research question here asked what impact the questionnaire placement had on the interview, in terms of self-disclosures.

With the different ordering of the interview and questionnaire, different reasons were expressed as very important to the students' decisions to withdraw. Personal reasons were very important 18% of the time when the interview came first, as compared to 32% when the questionnaire appeared first. School/work conflicts were also more prevalently mentioned more commonly when the questionnaire appeared first, occurring 32% of the time as compared to 8% when the interview appears first. For personal problems, school/work conflicts, and needing to take a break from school, when a student was given the questionnaire first he or she was more likely to express in the subsequent interview that these reasons were very important in making the withdrawal decision.

In contrast, one of the other reasons was expressed more often when the interview preceded the questionnaire. The group of students who were interviewed first more often expressed that dislike of college was very important in making their withdrawal decision.

We might interpret these results as meaning that filling out the questionnaire first allowed the student to let off steam on the questionnaire about disliking college, leaving the interview as a time to work through and discuss more personal, individual issues. Such an interpretation would be consistent with the finding regarding students' plans for returning to U.M.B.C. When the interview followed the questionnaire, students seemed clearer in the interview about the probability of their returning to U.M.B.C. With the interview first, 23% were unclear or thought their return was fairly improbable, as compared to 10% expressing these ideas when the questionnaire came first. The interview did not necessarily push the students toward a particular future plan, but did serve to clarify and solidify future plans.

DISCUSSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This study was aimed at further understanding withdrawing students by examining interviewers' perceptions. Consistent with the students' own responses, the interviewers found that the students most often were leaving U.M.B.C. due more to individual reasons rather than institutional dissatisfaction.

Several pieces of data contribute to the overall picture that attrition from U.M.B.C. is not primarily due to institutional factors. First, disliking U.M.B.C. was rarely raised in the interview as a major reason for withdrawing; personal, academic, and employment difficulties were much more the norm. Second, the majority of withdrawing students had a high probability of returning to U.M.B.C., according to both their interviewers and them themselves. We see, then, that withdrawal seems to stem more from situational and tempo-

rary problems.

Thus, while U.M.B.C. need not blame itself for being the cause of student withdrawal, it is noteworthy that many of the students had dissatisfactions that U.M.B.C. could fruitfully address. These dissatisfactions alone do not cause attrition, but they may contribute to a student's overall attitude about being in college.

A major source of dissatisfaction was conflict with faculty and administrators. Withdrawing students sometimes felt themselves imbattled in a system that did not listen to them. In the preceding report, we found that a number of students had never talked with faculty and staff, and that the majority of withdrawing students did not discuss their decision to withdraw with any U.M.B.C. staff. The global picture is one of withdrawing students feeling alienated from faculty and staff; with such feelings, when problems arise these students may find it easier to withdraw than to remain, and work out their problems. Earlier contact with faculty advisors and university services would assist in retaining this high-risk student population. Increased publicity about the Withdrawal Office as a place to problem-solve instead of just to withdraw could also help such students to prevent problems getting so large that withdrawal is necessary.

In looking at the various factors involved in withdrawal from U.M.B.C., we find a few distinct types of withdrawing students. By describing these types here, we hope to be alert to possible problem areas; we do not, however, believe that all withdrawing students fit into these patterns.

Students withdrawing at the beginning of the semester seem to be a diverse group, with a wide range of difficulties and characteristics. At least at the time that they withdraw, it seems unlikely

that most of these students will return to U.M.B.C., but they are not particularly unhappy with the school itself.

In contrast, many students withdrawing about the 13th week of the semester are both discontent with the school and unsure about their own fit into college. Academic difficulties are a primary reason for leaving, but personal finances and negative feelings about U.M.B.C. are also major factors in influencing these students' withdrawal decisions. Perhaps because so many factors are contributing to their decisions, it is less clear whether these students will return than it is for students withdrawing at any other time. One gets the sense that these students are just "fed up" and want to get away; they may not have thought through their future plans. It seems possible that it is with this group of students that the Withdrawal Office and other staff could have the greatest impact, either by preventing their withdrawal by helping them work out their difficulties or by creating a good last impression of U.M.B.C. as they withdraw and encouraging them to return.

The students withdrawing at the end of the semester are again a more diverse group, like those withdrawing very early in the semester. However, these later withdrawers more often plan to return to U.M.B.C. Their withdrawal seems to be a function of situational, temporary problems (academic or otherwise), rather than general discontentment with U.M.B.C. These students may be less in need of problem-solving services than students withdrawing at previous times in the semester.

There is also a syndrome associated with student status rather than with time of withdrawal. Part-time students are much more

likely to leave due to school/employment conflicts. These students are probably more often already engaged in a number of conflicting roles, and when problems occur, their student status receives low priority. Their withdrawal presents a particularly difficult problem, since there is little U.M.B.C. can do to prevent such attrition. However, more preventative advising regarding course selection and financial assistance when possible might serve to alleviate the part-timers' problems. Greater course selection and more evening classes would also prove worthwhile for these students. As U.M.B.C. attracts more non-traditional students, we may expect to see this type of withdrawal increasing.

We also see that there is a distinctive student who withdraws due to not being "adjusted to University life." Such students withdraw for a number of related reasons: not liking college, being unsure of their major, seeing conflict between school and social life, and wanting a break from school. While we cannot isolate one variable as a cause, these students either may be psychologically not ready for college (in which case a planned academic leave may be in order) or may not yet have found their particular niche. In the later case, helping these students with such services as career counseling and time management may avert the necessity of withdrawal.

A final implication of this report concerns the working procedures of the office. Findings indicate that similar information is gathered from both interviewers and students, with the exceptions

that students are more emphatic in their reasons for leaving and also see school/social life conflict as being less important than do interviewers. Collecting data from both sources appears to be unnecessary, so long as the data are interpreted with the above differences in mind. If data are collected from the students, giving the questionnaire before the interview appears to be the better choice, to allow students to transcend their dissatisfactions with college to the point of discussing more personal, individual reasons in the interview.

In concluding, we have identified a number of patterns characterizing student withdrawal from U.M.B.C. Awareness of these patterns, rather than blaming attrition on the system, will help the University to provide focused outreach services aimed at preventing withdrawal and/or encouraging re-admission after necessary withdrawal.

EVALUATION OF THE WITHDRAWAL OFFICE FOR SPRING, 1981

Kim Daubman and Deborah Hazel Johnson

As mentioned in previous sections of this report, the Withdrawal Office (WO) was established as a one-semester pilot program, the evaluation of which would determine continuation. The Office had a twofold purpose: to help withdrawing students on an individual basis and to supply information on withdrawal to UMBC at large. Therefore, it was important that the evaluation reflect both individual and system needs and reactions.

To evaluate a new program like the Withdrawal Office, one must look at a wide variety of factors. There must be an examination of not only the extent to which the program achieved its goals (outcome evaluation), but also of the way in which the project actually ran (process evaluation). In addition, basic statistics on cost, utilization, and time expenditure are crucial to an understanding of what happened in the program.

Thus, in planning the program evaluation of the Withdrawal Office (WO), we incorporated a wide variety of questions, techniques, and measures. Some aspects of the evaluation were included to help in bettering the program, both as it evolved during the semester and after the semester's pilot project ended. Other components focused more on questions of effectiveness and usefulness to UMBC, to aid in deciding whether the WO should continue to exist.

The results of the evaluation are presented in this report. For the sake of clarity and focus, we have grouped the results according to content area and have highlighted the conclusions

more than the method. The purpose of the report is to convey an overview of the process and outcome of the WO functions in the Spring semester 1981.

THE EVALUATION

Records of student contact

To obtain information about the number and type of students using the WO, records were kept for all contacts made by the WO staff, by phone or in person. These records included information on the reasons that students visited the WO and the action they planned to take after speaking with an interviewer. We found that:

1. 308 visits were made to the Office.

2. 47 students visited the Office unsure of whether or not to withdraw. Of those,
   - 30% or 12 students decided to withdraw at that time.
   - 58% or 23 students decided not to withdraw (at least temporarily).
   - 13% or 5 students left the Office still undecided. (n=40; missing data=7)

3. 219 students came to the Office intending to withdraw. However, 11 of those students (7% of the 168 students for whom we had this data) decided not to withdraw (at least temporarily) after talking with a withdrawal interviewer.

4. 42 of the visits to the Office were made by students who had a previous contact with the Office. Second contacts were generally made to acquire information.

5. Many students were referred to on-or off-campus offices and departments to fulfill personal needs. For example,
   - 44 students were referred to the Registrar or Admissions.
   - 25 students were referred to the Counseling Center.
   - 25 students were referred to Financial Aid.

- 13 students were referred to at least one faculty.
- 7 students were referred to the Career Development and Placement Center.
- 5 students were referred to Accounting.
- 7 students were referred to Advising.
- 8 students were referred to Co-op.
- 4 students were referred to the on-campus Veteran's Administration Office.
- Students were also referred to such places as Commuter Affairs, the Allied Health Advisors, off-campus community mental health agencies, UMAB, and banks.

Office Log

In addition to the more formal Student Contact Reports, WO staff kept a log of miscellaneous ways in which students used the WO. While an explicit objective of the WO was to provide assistance for students considering withdrawing, it soon became clear that students were also using the WO as a source of information regarding institutional implications of withdrawal. Specifically, the WO staff encountered several bits of misinformation that they were able to correct. For example, some students incorrectly believed that withdrawal from UMBC would adversely affect their re-admission applications. Other students considering withdrawal decided to remain when they discovered that they would be required to return portions of Basic Grant Disbursements when withdrawing in the first half of the semester.

Public Relations

The new WO was publicized through individual letters sent to all faculty members, an announcement at an Office of Residential

Life meeting, and a notice in the Retriever. In addition, the "Withdrawal" section in the Undergraduate Catalogue (yet to be issued) was rewritten to reflect the change in the withdrawal process. A flyer to be sent to students, promoting the WO as a place to seek guidance on academic decisions, was considered but temporarily tabled due to concern that such advertising seemed to promote the idea of leaving UMBC.

In order to assess the effectiveness of these promotion efforts, we asked students visiting the WO if and where they had heard of the Office. Of those 186 students (out of a total of 308) who had heard of the WO:

- 79% of the students had heard through the Registrar.
- 10% had heard through a previous contact with the WO.
- 2% had heard through Advising.
- 2% had heard from faculty.
- 1% had heard through the Office of Residential Life.
- 3% had heard through other sources, such as the Vice Chancellor for Administrative Affairs, Financial Aid, and other students.

Since students used to come to the Registrar's Office to withdraw before the WO opened, it is apparent from these data that most students continued to come to the Registrar's Office initially and were then referred to the WO. Apparently, most students had not heard to the WO before coming to the Administration Building to withdraw. Our efforts at promotion through faculty letters, the Retriever, and the Office of Residential Life are not, at least yet, effective in reaching students.

Procedure evaluation

The WO has two rather different functions: counseling students and collecting data. In formulating the procedure by which both functions could be carried out, we wanted to be sure that the more impersonal data collection did not negate the impact of the personal contact, and that we were not skewing our data with our emphasis on the personalized approach. Specifically, if we gave the questionnaire before the interview, the questionnaire data would be unbiased, but would students be turned off? Or if we did the interview first, might the responses to the questionnaires be biased by whatever occurred in the interview?

As part of the formative evaluation, we assessed the impact of both types of procedures on the students, as discussed in the preceding report by Susege and Johnson. Since we previously discussed this aspect of the study, here we shall only briefly mention its findings and their implications. The study was done at the very beginning of the WO, to allow its findings to be implemented as part of the ongoing procedure of the WO. We determined that there was a more positive impact on the interview if the questionnaire was given first, and this procedure seemed to have no dissatisfying effect on the students or Withdrawal Interviewers. Accordingly, the questionnaire was given before the interview for the remainder of the semester.

Instrumentation check

Since the reason for giving the Withdrawing Students' Questionnaire was to collect accurate information, we wanted to be sure the questionnaire itself was designed in such a way as

to elicit optimal information. Unanswerable questions arose while it was being designed: should demographic information go first or last? Would a friendly introduction to each section help to personalize the questionnaire, or would the additional length of such introductions negate any positive impact they had?

To assess the best way of designing the questionnaire, we developed a set of four questionnaires with the same questions but with different orders and introductions, as described in the previous report by Gordon and Johnson. These questionnaires were given to all withdrawing students, with the particular type of questionnaire distributed randomly. Comparisons of responses to the four questionnaires indicated no effect of questionnaire type on students' responses or on students' reactions to the questionnaire. Thus, it apparently does not matter how the parts of the questionnaire are introduced or ordered.

Follow-up: Consumer satisfaction survey

An important aspect of outcome evaluation is the satisfaction of consumers of the program. Here, we wanted to know the reactions of the withdrawn students to the WO services, but our follow-up survey also had several other goals. We were interested in exploring whether various subgroups of students had different needs concerning withdrawal, what type of withdrawal process the students preferred, and whether undergoing a withdrawal interview had an impact on students' satisfaction with their withdrawal decision and their intention to return to UMBC.

Optimally, such questions would be addressed through randomly assigning some students to undergo the WO procedure and

others to undergo the withdrawal procedure used before the WO existed, and comparing the satisfaction of the two groups. In this case, however, as is true in many applied settings, not offering all students the same service was perceived as inequitable, so the two-group random assignment method could not be used. The next best method is to use naturally-occurring comparison groups, implemented here by comparing students withdrawing through the WO to students withdrawing prior to the opening of the WO. While the obvious limitation of this method is the time difference between the two groups, this comparison allowed the best way of addressing our questions.

All undergraduate students who withdrew from UMBC in November and December, 1980 (before WO opened), and all those who withdrew in February and March, 1981 (after WO was in operation), served as the subjects. The Withdrawal Interview staff made three attempts at phoning each potential subject, with a total of 55 WO withdrawees and 32 non-WO withdrawees being successfully contacted. A standardized interview/verbal questionnaire format was used, including both open-ended and multiple-choice items regarding satisfaction with withdrawal process and intention to return to UMBC.

The following are the findings based on analyses of the survey data:

1. Of the students who underwent an interview before withdrawing from UMBC,

   - 71% said they were glad they were allowed to express dissatisfactions and satisfactions with UMBC through the interview.

- 61% said they enjoyed or found useful having a person available through the WO with whom to discuss alternatives.
- 37.5% indicated that they either did consult with an interviewer before they made their decision to withdraw or would have done so had they known that persons in the WO were available for this purpose.

2. Although both full- and part-time students were equally likely to feel positively in general toward undergoing an interview, full-time students were more likely to find the interview useful for specific reasons (i.e., to discuss alternatives, to discuss satisfactions and dissatisfactions, and to receive decision making assistance).

3. Students who withdrew after the WO was in operation were neither more or less satisfied with the process for withdrawal than students who withdrew before the Office opened. However, full-time students were more satisfied with both processes than were part-time students. Part-time students were more likely to express the desire to withdraw quickly and after normal business hours. (Identifying these needs early in the semester, we at the Office began to allow for withdrawal by mail in which case the interviews were conducted by telephone.)

4. Students who did not particularily like having an interview did not necessarily express the desire to have the process changed or the interview eliminated.

5. Students who consulted family, friends, or UMBC faculty or staff prior to withdrawal were not more or less likely to feel positively towards having an interview than students who did not.

(30% of students surveyed had not consulted anyone about their option to withdraw before making their decision.)

6. Expressing satisfaction with the decision to withdraw from UMBC did not vary with feelings toward having an interview; nor did it vary with the absence or presence of having an interview. That is, going through a withdrawal interview did not necessarily make students more satisfied with their decision to leave UMBC, nor did feeling satisfied with the interview influence satisfaction with the decision.

7. Only 1/6 of the students who withdrew after the A.L.W.O. was in operation expressed that it was unlikely they would return to UMBC, whereas more than 1/3 of the students who withdrew prior to the A.L.W.O. existence expressed that it was unlikely they would return. However, this difference may as well be due to the different time in the semester the student withdrew as to the process the student underwent. As noted above, students who withdrew in November and December (late in the semester) comprised our sample of students who withdrew without receiving a withdrawal interview whereas students who withdrew in February and March (early in the semester) comprised the comparative sample.

Survey of UMBC Staff

In addition to withdrawing students' reactions, the evaluation of the WO encompassed the reactions of UMBC staff to the WO. Since the WO, as previously mentioned, referred many students to other departments on campus, the staff in these departments might have useful feedback to give to the WO staff. It is important that the WO assist and interact well with other campus departments, since the WO serves not only students but also the University community.

Accordingly, we mailed evaluation questionnaires to those offices to which the WO had referred two or more students during the Spring semester. Some offices included more than one person to whom students were referred, so a total of 14 evaluation questionnaires were sent to 11 UMBC offices.

The questionnaires included questions on perceptions of the role of the WO, satisfaction with the WO's functioning in this role, interfacing between the WO and the respondents' office, and strengths and weaknesses of the WO. Both open-ended items and Likert scales were used, to obtain both qualitative and quantitative data.

Six people responded to the questionnaire, with two of these stating that they could not respond specifically to the questionnaire items because they did not know which students had been referred from the WO; however, most of the respondents did give information regarding their evaluation of the WO. Informal comments of persons requested to respond who di not do so indicated that these people had no perceptions of the WO due to a lack of contact with WO staff or students sent from the WO.

The following findings summarize the reactions of polled UMBC staff to the WO:

1. The role of the WO was seen as:
   - giving students a chance to talk about why they are leaving; providing assistance and understanding.
   - giving students re-admission information
   - collecting data on the reasons behind withdrawal decisions.

- help students consider various decision options
- facilitate acquisition of other appropriate campus resources
- give a final personal touch to students leaving our school.

2. Extent to which WO satisfactorily functioned in these roles:

On a 1-7 scale, with 7 indicating "very satisfactory", 3 respondents indicated "very satisfactory" and 1 respondent indicated "no way of knowing"

3. Ways in which persons in other offices had hoped the WO would interface with them:

- The Veterans Office wanted the WO to provide them with names of withdrawing veterans, so the VA Office could discuss the impact of withdrawal on VA benefits with these students.
- The Counseling Center noted that it provides direct service to WO referees.
- The Office of the Vice-Chancellor for Administrative Affairs wanted the WO to advise students who have in the past requested such help from the VCAA office.

4. Extent to which such interfacing occurred satisfactorily:

On a 1-7 scale, with 7 indicating "very satisfactory", the VA responded with a 6 and the Counseling Center responded with a 7.

5. Strengths of the WO:

- Always open
- Giving students an opportunity to talk

- Flexibility
- Visible sign of UMBC's commitment to retention

6. Weaknesses of the WO:
   - Some students did not like the idea of filling out the questionnaire (given to all withdrawing students)
   - The potential richness of the inter-campus resource system has not yet been adequately explored.
7. Suggestions for change:
   - Regular communications to all interested parties containing student contact data, etc.
   - When the WO refers students to our office, have them indicate the referral sources.
   - Advertise your services

Cost Effectiveness

The actual financial cost of the WO was minimized from the beginning by hiring graduate students on a part-time basis, rather than acquiring full-time staff. In evaluating the WO, we included various calculations of cost effectiveness, to have some specific ideas about whether the financial cost was commensurate with the gain to UMBC.

At a cost of $5,000 per semester to pay the staff, the WO cost UMBC $24.50 for each student who withdrew, or $16.23 for each student contact made by the WO staff. The WO was open 40 hours a week for 16 weeks, with a cost of $7.81 an hour.

Considering only the 34 students who contacted the WO but decided (at least temporarily) not to withdraw, it cost UMBC $147.06 apiece to retain them through the WO. While we do not

know whether all these students stayed through the semester, and it is not possible to determine the time in the semester they would have withdrawn and the consequent refund UMBC would have paid to them, we can make some very tentative calculations based on estimates. If all 34 students were Maryland residents and received an average refund of 50% of their fees (refunds vary from 80% to 0%, depending on time of withdrawal), with fees at $514 apiece, UMBC would have refunded a total of $8,738.00 to these 34 students. With a total operating cost of $5,000, according to these calculations the WO saved the University $3,738.00 above its operating cost by retaining these 34 students. Although these calculations are only crude estimates, the figures give us an idea that the financial benefits of the WO probably outweigh its costs.

Re-admission

Both cost-effectiveness and consumer satisfaction data could be extended by using re-admission rates of former withdrawees. If we found more WO withdrawees re-entering UMBC in subsequent semesters than pre-WO withdrawees, for example, it would seem that the WO is more cost-effective as well as satisfying to its users. These data are currently being obtained but are not yet available for this report.

SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

Besides its overt objectives of counseling withdrawing students, the Withdrawal Office serves several other functions: correcting misinformation, helping students decide whether or not to withdraw, and giving a more positive last impression of UMBC to withdrawing students. The WO also assists students in finding the appropriate campus office to help them.

While the WO was much used during its first semester in operation, the office was not as well publicized as would be optimal. It is to be expected that such a new office would not enjoy the word-of-mouth referral sources that would occur later. However, an increased attempt at letting the UMBC community know of its services would enhance the WO's ability to help prevent withdrawal by assisting students before they get to the point of withdrawing.

The evaluation pointed to several aspects of the internal procedure of the WO which can contribute to the overall efficacy of the Office. Giving students the questionnaire before doing the interview helps to facilitate a good discussion in the interview, assuming the questionnaire is kept brief. However, it seems entirely feasible for the interviewer to supply most of the data based on the interview, thus eliminating the need for students to respond to most questionnaire items other than demographic items. Since the form of the students' questionnaire does not seem to matter, it is recommended that a short questionnaire regarding demographics be given to withdrawing students before the interview, with the more substantive data to be supplied later by the interviewers, on a questionnaire developed for this purpose.

The interview appears to be most useful to withdrawing students as a forum to express their satisfactions and dissatisfactions with UMBC. It

seems to feel good to have an opportunity to vent these feelings before leaving; while there is not yet data on this issue, one might postulate that such venting may allow a student to more readily consider returning to UMBC at a later date. The interview also is an ideal opportunity to clarify misperceptions and misinformation, a process which can at times either prevent a student from withdrawing or enable the student to later re-apply. Both these functions clearly necessitate the presence of a trained interviewer with time to talk; the WO thus gives an important personal touch to the withdrawal process that would be impossible without such a specially-created office.

While the WO served full-time students well, part-timers continue to encounter difficulties with the withdrawal process. The part-time students were satisfied with the interview, but the pragmatics of time pressures for these students require UMBC to use alternative procedures to fulfill their needs. Since a typical part-time student may have primary identification and priorities off-campus rather than on-campus, the withdrawal process needs to go quickly and, in some cases, after normal business hours. The WO rose to this challenge by conducting interviews by phone and allowing withdrawal through the mail. Many students, though, may not know about these options, and the very existence of a mandatory interview could be questioned for a student whose dropping of his or her only course necessitates university withdrawal.

Particularly as the returning student population increases, it will be important for the WO to publicize various withdrawal options, to open some evening hours, and to consider making interviews mandatory only for full-time students.

The WO was able to do a good job referring students to diverse on-

and off-campus departments and agencies. To assist these other departments, it would be useful for the WO staff to develop a referral form, so that the department will know how and why a student was referred. The use of such a form would also allow future WO evaluations to assess the actual completion rate of referrals.

Finally, the WO appears to be a low-cost service with high utilization and high satisfaction. Preliminary calculations suggest that the Office is very cost-effective, but more data are needed to confirm this finding. Such data should be an integral part of further WO evaluations, necessitating that the WO keep a file of names of all student contacts. Due to concerns about confidentiality and anonymity, names were not collected during Spring 1981; those original concerns, however, appear not to be warranted, since students must complete University withdrawal forms, which include names. It is recommended that names be requested and collected regularly, except when a student objects.

In summary, the WO is as useful, viable office with an excellent beginning. This report noted some initial weaknesses to be cleared, but in general the WO seems to be well worth the University's money and space.

Appendix I

Withdrawal Questionnaire for Students

WITHDRAWAL QUESTIONNAIRE

Date: _____
Month Day Year

Approximate Time of Withdrawal:

1. 8:30 am - 10:30 am
2. 10:30 am - 12:30 pm
3. 12:30 pm - 2:30 pm
4. 2:30 pm - 4:30 pm

Although you have decided to withdraw from UMBC at this time, we would appreciate your full and frank answers to this questionnaire. Your answers, and those of other withdrawing students, can help us to understand better the strengths and weaknesses of our school. We also designed the questionnaire to help you review the circumstances and events that were part of your experience at UMBC, and your decision to withdraw. We do recognize that it is not unusual for students to enter and withdraw, and even re-enter college in pursuing their educational and career goals. UMBC is still a young and changing school. We would like the chance to keep in touch with you to let you know of opportunities at UMBC that may be useful to you. But this can only be done if you choose to provide us with the necessary information (e.g., Name, Address, Phone Number). In addition, we would like to know how your educational and career plans develop.

NOTE: Your identity will be kept confidential, and if you so choose, you may remain anonymous.

* * *

Section A: Personal Perceptions: The questions in this section are aimed at identifying some of your reasons for attending UMBC, and your personal interactions while at UMBC.

I. In deciding to come to college in the first place, how important to you was each of the following reasons? Circle one response only for each item.

	Very important	Somewhat important	Not important
1. My parents wanted me to go.	1	2	3
2. I couldn't find a job.	1	2	3
3. I wanted to get away from home.	1	2	3
4. To be able to get a better job.	1	2	3
5. To gain a general education and appreciation of ideas.	1	2	3
6. To improve my reading and study skills.	1	2	3
7. There was nothing better to do.	1	2	3
8. To make me a more cultured person.	1	2	3
9. To be able to make more money.	1	2	3
10. To learn more about things that interest me.	1	2	3

11. To meet new and interesting people.	1	2	3
12. To prepare myself for graduate or professional school.	1	2	3

II. Why did you choose UMBC in particular when deciding to attend college? Circle one response for each item, according to its importance in reaching your decision.

	Very important	Somewhat important	Not important
1. My relatives wanted me to come here.	1	2	3
2. UMBC had a very good academic reputation.	1	2	3
3. I was offered financial assistance.	1	2	3
4. I was not accepted anywhere else.	1	2	3
5. Someone who went here before me advised me to attend.	1	2	3
6. UMBC has low tuition.	1	2	3
7. UMBC has a convenient location.	1	2	3
8. My friends were attending or planning to attend UMBC.	1	2	3
9. UMBC offers a specific academic program that interested me.	1	2	3
10. Other: specify _____ _____	1	2	3

III. On the average, how often each semester have you talked with the following people outside of class? Circle one response only for each item.

	Never	Once	2-5 Times	6 times or more
1. Instructor	0	1	2-5	6
2. Faculty Advisor	0	1	2-5	6
3. Allied Health Advisors	0	1	2-5	6
4. Learning Resource Center staff tutor	0	1	2-5	6
5. Counseling Center staff	0	1	2-5	6
6. Residence Life staff	0	1	2-5	6
7. Career Development & Placement staff	0	1	2-5	6
8. Cooperative Education staff	0	1	2-5	6
9. Financial Aid staff	0	1	2-5	6
10. Other staff, specify _____	0	1	2-5	6
11. Other UMBC students I already knew before coming here	0	1	2-5	6
12. Other UMBC students I hadn't known before coming here	0	1	2-5	6

Section B. Withdrawal from UMBC: The questions in this section concern the circumstances and events that were part of your decision to withdraw from UMBC.

IV. In deciding to withdraw now, how important to you was each of the following reasons? Circle one response only for each item.

	Very important	Somewhat important	Not important
1. Personal problems outside of school (marital, medical, family, etc.)	1	2	3
2. Academic difficulties	1	2	3
3. Lack of money	1	2	3
4. Don't like UMBC	1	2	3
5. School/work conflict	1	2	3
6. Don't like college	1	2	3
7. UMBC doesn't offer major that I want	1	2	3
8. Not sure of my major or why I'm in college	1	2	3
9. School/social life conflict	1	2	3
10. Want a break from school	1	2	3
11. Other: specify _____	1	2	3

V. Have you ever withdrawn from UMBC before?

1. No, never 2. Yes, once 3. Yes, more than once

VI. When did you begin thinking of withdrawing this time?

1. After midterms this semester
2. Before midterms this semester
3. Between last semester and this one
4. Last semester
5. Two semesters ago

VII. With which of the following people did you talk before making the decision to withdraw? Circle all that apply.

1. Instructor
2. Faculty Advisor
3. Allied Health Advisor
4. Learning Resource Center staff or tutor
5. Counselling Center staff
6. Career Development & Placement staff
7. Cooperative Education staff
8. Residential Life staff
9. Financial Aid staff
10. Family
11. Other UMBC students
12. Friends who aren't UMBC students
13. Other: Specify _____
14. Nobody

VIII. If a Withdrawal Counselor had been available to help you to make your decision about withdrawing, or to help you find solutions to problems which were making it hard for you to stay here, would you have wanted to talk with this counselor?

1. Yes, definitely
2. Yes, probably
3. Not sure
4. Probably not
5. Definitely not

IX. Describe in as much detail as you feel is appropriate, what your reasons are for leaving UMBC. (Use the opposite sides of questionnaire pages if needed.)

Section C: Reactions and Future Plans: We would like to know what your impressions of various aspects of the UMBC environment are now, and what you plan on doing after leaving UMBC.

X. How do you feel about each of the following aspects of UMBC? Circle one response only for each item.

	Dissatisfied Very	Somewhat	Neutral	Satisfied Somewhat	Very	Never Used
1. Counseling Center	1	2	3	4	5	0
2. Cooperative Education	1	2	3	4	5	0
3. Learning Resource Center	1	2	3	4	5	0
4. Financial Aid Office	1	2	3	4	5	0
5. Faculty Advisement	1	2	3	4	5	0
6. Student on-campus housing	1	2	3	4	5	0
7. Allied Health Advisor	1	2	3	4	5	0
8. Career Development & Placement	1	2	3	4	5	0
9. Transportation to campus	1	2	3	4	5	0
10. Residence Life	1	2	3	4	5	0
11. Campus social activities	1	2	3	4	5	0
12. Quality of courses	1	2	3	4	5	
13. Range of courses & majors	1	2	3	4	5	
14. Student/faculty relationship	1	2	3	4	5	
15. Physical planning (building, campus)	1	2	3	4	5	
16. Other: Specify _____ _____	1	2	3	4	5	

XI. Now that you have decided to withdraw, what plans do you have for your future?

1. Seek or continue part or full-time employment
2. Enter another college
3. Enter a trade school or technical school
4. Re-enter UMBC in a semester or two
5. Undecided
6. Other: Specify _____

XII. If you could change some things at UMBC that would have influenced you to remain at UMBC, what would they be? (Use opposite sides of questionnaire pages if needed.)

Section D: Demographic Information: The following items have been included to give us at UMBC an idea of the different types of students who withdraw from UMBC.

XIII. Age: Circle appropriate number

1. 18 or under
2. 19-21
3. 22-25
4. 26-29
5. 30-39
6. 40-50
7. 60 or over

XIV. Racial/Ethnic Group: Circle all that apply.

1. Afro-American/Black
2. Caucasian-American/White
3. Asian-American/Oriental
4. Hispanic-American
5. American Indian
6. Other: Specify _____

XV. Sex: Circle appropriate number.

1. Male
2. Female

XVI. Marital Status: Circle appropriate number only.

1. Single
2. Married without children
3. Single Parent
4. Married with children

XVII. Number of Credits Earned (total): Circle number.

1. 0-27
2. 28-55
3. 56-83
4. 84-120

XVIII. What is your major? (If undecided, or if decided but major program is unavailable here, please specify so.) _____

XIX. When did you first begin at UMBC? Specify semester and year.

_____ Semester (Fall, Minimester, Spring, or Summer)

_____ Year

XX. Jobs held this past semester (paying jobs): Check appropriate space.

_____ Full-time
_____ Part-time (Number of hours/week _____)
_____ None

XXI. While attending UMBC, did you reside

_____ On-campus (in dorms)
_____ Off-campus (with parents/guardians)
_____ Off-campus (independently)

Section E. Optional Information. The following items are intended to allow us the opportunity to reach out to you if changes occur at UMBC (e.g., new programs or services) which may be helpful in your attaining your goals.

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone Number: _____

Service(s) you would like to see offered at UMBC: _____

_____

_____

Social Security Number _____

Section F: Questionnaire Impression.

What is your overall impression of this questionnaire? Circle one response only please.

1. Very positive
2. Moderately positive
3. Slightly positive
4. Neutral, no opinion
5. Slightly negative
6. Moderately negative
7. Very negative

WITHDRAWAL INTERVIEWER'S QUESTIONNAIRE

Questionnaire # _____

Date: _____

Interviewer _____

1. In deciding to withdraw now, how important to the student do you think the following reasons were? Circle one response only for each item.

	Very Important	Somewhat Important	Not Important
1. Personal problems outside of school (marital, medical, family, etc.)	1	2	3
2. Academic difficulties	1	2	3
3. Lack of money	1	2	3
4. Doesn't like UMBC	1	2	3
5. School/work conflict	1	2	3
6. Doesn't like college	1	2	3
7. UMBC doesn't offer major that student wants	1	2	3
8. Not sure of his/her major or why he/she is in college	1	2	3
9. School/social life conflict	1	2	3
10. Wants a break from school	1	2	3
11. Other: specify _____			

_____

2. What are your perceptions of this student's dissatisfactions with UMBC?

3. Are there any things at UMBC that would have influenced this student to remain at UMBC? What are they?

4. What plans does this student have for the future?

1. Seek or continue part or full-time employment
2. Enter another college
3. Enter a trade school or technical school
4. Re-enter UMBC in a semester or two
5. Undecided
6. Other: specify: _____

5. What is your assessment of the probability of this student returning to UMBC within the next year?

1. Very improbable
2. Fairly improbable
3. Really unclear
4. Fairly probable
5. Very probable